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## ABSTRACT

Interviews were conducted with 4 members of the Task Force of the Adult Beginning Reader Project, 6 program officials, and 13 heads of adult basic education (ABE) programs; site visits were made to two ongoing ABE programs; and the literature pertaining to adult literacy programs in this country was reviewed in order to identify factors associated with the success of literacy programs. Making personal contact with potential students and using verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to convince potential students that they could succeed in the given literacy program were found to be the keys to successful student recruitment campaigns. In the area of program intake, conducting (1) an intake conference in which student expectations, student schedules, and the amount of progress to be expected were addressed and (2) a comprehensive reading diagnosis were found to be crucial factors. Instructional methods found to be successful were either carefully structured and sequenced with a strong phonics component or, on the other hand, were less structured and more informal, with incidental phonics. Affective factors found to be important included teacher morale, sensitivity, compassion, and the ability to explain things well. Strong staff development programs, policies to encourage student attendance and program completion, provision of counseling services, and provision of long- rather than short-term courses were found to characterize successful programs. (A 14-page bibliography is included.) (MN)

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ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF  
EFFECTIVE ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS:  
A Review and Analysis of the Research

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THE ADULT BEGINNING READER PROJECT  
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

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## Foreword

In 1981, recognizing the special and urgent needs of English speaking adults reading below the fifth grade level, the New York State Education Department directed adult literacy and basic education programs to allocate more of their resources to students at the lower literacy levels. To help programs teach these student more effectively, the NYSED Bureau of Adult and Continuing Education Program Development organized the Task Force on Adult Beginning Readers.

In looking over our collective experience in literacy, the members of the Task Force observed several curious phenomena:

- o In literacy, there was little opportunity to learn from the experience of others. Ours was a field where fragmentation and lack of communication among programs, and even within them, had been the rule. It was not difficult to see how this situation had come about. Many teachers and other staff had learned on the job, with little or no formal training in literacy or adult education. Many teachers worked part time, sometimes in two or three different sites or programs. Funding patterns allowed for little formal exchange among program staff, and institutional affiliations sometimes made exchanges among programs difficult to organize.
- o When they did get together, experienced literacy teachers and administrators could frequently be found insisting vehemently and absolutely on totally contradictory approaches to instruction. Such assertions, however, were often unsubstantiated, and the resulting disagreements went unresolved because there was so little valid research or hard data in adult literacy.
- o Although much of the debate we heard centered on methodology, we felt strongly that other aspects of program design and management, particularly those relating to support offered to students and to teachers, were perhaps equally significant.

Accordingly, the Task Force set two major goals for its work:

1. To establish, through a review of existing research and through observation and correspondence with exemplary programs, what could be said with confidence about the characteristics of effective adult literacy programs, and what remained speculation.
2. To develop a model for professional exchange that would serve not only to bring the findings of the research to those working in literacy, but also to inspire a continuing process of self-analysis and of collaboration within and among programs.

With funds provided under Section 310 of the Adult Education Act, the New York State Education Department set up a special project, supervised by the Task Force, to meet these goals. A teacher development component, starting in 1982-83 and continuing through June 1985, has provided a prototype for a process of professional self-analysis and exchange usable by staff at all levels within a program or by groups that cut across program lines. At the same time, a review of research was begun. It resulted in a broad overview that discussed the characteristics of effective adult literacy teachers, management issues, and inservice strategies.<sup>1</sup> The next phase of the research component, namely this report, was designed to be a more detailed study of the essential characteristics of the administrative structures and instructional methods of effective adult literacy programs.

We have been fortunate indeed to have obtained the services of Miriam Balmuth for this part of the research. Her experience, wise judgment, and honesty, as reflected so abundantly in her report, provide a touchstone for determining what in adult literacy has been clearly established and what remains to be learned. Using Dr. Balmuth's work, new programs can begin with confidence and make informed decisions, and established programs can assess their work more accurately.

That so much remains uncertain is, at present, a fact of life in adult literacy. As this report demonstrates, however, some things can be stated with confidence; we need not retread the same ground yet again. And with the climate of mutual support and collaborative effort that we sense lately in the field of literacy, we may at last go forward to explore new terrain.

June 1986

Bonne August, Project Director

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Patterson and Staff, Final Report for the Bureau of Community and Continuing Education Program Development, New York State Education Department, Adult Beginning Reader Project (Project Number 06573, October 1983).

## PROCEDURE

To begin this study, I made a preliminary survey of writings and research reports cited in ABE literature. From that survey, it became apparent that many of the writings and reports actually addressed populations and cultures that were not congruent with the target population of the Adult Beginner Reading Project. Thus, some programs had taken place in foreign countries, where varied and often subtle factors might well have affected student characteristics and program administration options and thus reduced applicability to programs in this country. Other programs focused on teaching subjects other than beginning reading; for example, speaking the English language or reading at the 5th grade level or above. Moreover, writings about exemplary programs or about effective practices were often based on programs for children or for adolescents younger than 17 years of age, whose developmental stages, life histories, and current life styles, as well as strengths and needs, differ vastly from those of the target population.

It was decided, therefore, to confine the survey to programs located in the United States that were designed, as is the Adult Beginning Reader Project, for English-speaking adults, 17 years of age or older, who read below 5th grade level--with only occasional reference to pertinent findings in writings about other populations. While this eliminated many of the sources listed in ABE literature, what remained was a body that could be cited with a fair degree of confidence.

With the focus clearly established, the procedure was then to identify effective programs through consultation with adult basic education providers and by studying writings about ABE programs. Thus, I met with the 4 members of the Task Force of the Adult Beginning Reader Project, and with 6 officials, and I communicated in person or by telephone with 13 heads of ABE programs. I visited 2 on-going ABE programs, attended 4 discussion meetings of teachers who were participants in the Adult Beginning Reader Project, and interviewed 3 students in ABE programs.

In addition, in May 1984, I attended 4 of a series of panel discussions sponsored by the New York Public Library on "The Crisis in Literacy in the United States Today," in which an array of prominent theoreticians and practitioners offered

their views and discussed their differences on the topic of adult literacy.

The interviews, meetings, and visits were followed by an examination of research reports and of the writings of practitioners, providers, and scholars of adult basic education. These included the papers presented at the National Adult Literacy Conference (The National Adult Literacy Project, Washington, D.C., January 19-20, 1984) at which a number of leaders in adult education and in reading summarized their views on the current state of the field.

In the course of reading each book or article, as well as during the interviews, I sought to determine whether there were any administrative or methodological factors identified with effectiveness or with ineffectiveness. Such factors were noted and grouped with references on the same factors in other sources. An effort was then made to collate the references and arrive at a picture of either a consensus or a divergence of views concerning each factor.

## ASSUMPTIONS

The literature of ABE has its share of unresolved questions and philosophical controversies. While such problems are in need of resolution, many of them are peripheral to the purpose of this survey. In the interest of focus and brevity, therefore, they are not addressed. Instead, the assumption was made that the audience for this report consists of knowledgeable ABE providers and practitioners who are conversant with the background problems that even the most casual overview of the field would soon reveal.

Thus, the question of the definition of literacy is avoided--as is that of illiteracy. This audience knows what is meant here.

The philosophical question of whether to teach adults to read at all is not addressed: In New York, with its varied combinations, in tandem, of major and minor subcultures, "literacy haves" know the benefits of their possession and want to give the "literacy have-notes" at least the option of sharing them.

The exact number of illiterate adult Americans is not discussed. Despite the contradictory figures arrives at by using a variety of measures, all studies indicate that there are far too many.

The limitations of available standardized tests for adult beginning readers is not dwelt upon. The need for improved testing has been pointed out regularly. Moreover, although the results of certain studies had to be discounted because of the limitations of the reading tests upon which those results were based, there do exist a number of fairly useful measures from which to choose (e.g., Peck and Kling, p.681).

The literature on competency-based programs as exemplified by the Adult Performance Level work in Texas is not included. New York State has chosen not to go that route, a route which in any case is meant for a clientele with literacy skills somewhat more advanced than those of the beginning readers of this survey.

The terms "teacher" and "instructor" are synonymous here and refer to anyone engaged in direct instruction of ABE students, whether of a class, a small group, or an individual

student. Volunteer 1-to-1 tutors are thus considered teachers or instructors as well.

Finally, there is not a lament about the dearth of good research in the field. The problems of poor control of variables, small numbers of subjects, lack of control groups, and brief duration of the studies have been acknowledged many times, as has been the need to study much more closely almost every aspect of adult basic education.

## RESULTS

The survey indicated that the factors discussed below are among those that seem to be related to successful reading achievement on the part of adult speakers of English whose reading ability is on a level between .0 and 4.9. Although other factors have been named in various sources and may have impact on ABE student achievement, those included here are believed to be among the most significant.

Unless otherwise noted, the statements and recommendations are based upon more than one source--generally upon multiple sources. In the interests of conciseness and accessibility, however, the number of identified sources has been kept as limited as possible without sacrificing the need to cite research evidence and authoritative opinions. In many cases, the vigor and illumination of an author's words called for the inclusion of direct quotations, and a substantial number of those are to be found in the report.

In the survey, factors related to the success or failure of ABE programs tend to fall into 3 categories of evidence:

(1) Factors that were omnipresent in the writings and about which there is almost universal agreement on their importance. So many authors refer to them in so many ways that they demand the greatest consideration. Those are discussed below at length. An example is the need for counseling services for ABE students.

(2) Factors that appear in many writings but with equivocal findings, equivocal opinions, or both. Those are presented with references to the divergent views. Group instruction versus 1-to-1 instruction is an example.

(3) Factors that were mentioned only once or twice, perhaps just in one study or even in an oral statement by one ABE leader, but that are striking in their rationality. Those are listed and briefly examined. An example is the finding in the Portage Township study that a highly significant number of dropouts tended to return to the program if they had teachers who gave clear and simple explanations.

In the listing that follows, however, factors that are related to the same aspect of ABE programs are groups and discussed in the same section, regardless of which of the above 3 categories they fall into.

## I. INITIAL EXPERIENCES

As is discussed in detail later on, student dropout is an endemic problem in all adult basic education. Furthermore, it is the greatest problem for those who achieve the lowest scores on reading pretests. Not only do such students drop out more often, but they tend to drop out earlier (Pasch, p. 19).

In the case of such students, as Ulmer and Dorland point out, "the low self-esteem and their lack of information combine to prevent illiterates from seeing literacy classes as a means of improving their circumstances" (p. 7). Knowles' comment applies to such students as well: "In the case of some adults, the remembrance of the classroom as a place where one is treated with disrespect and may fail is so strong that it serves as a serious barrier to their becoming involved in adult education activities at all" (1980, p. 46).

That lack of a positive perception and the resultant fragility of any initial motivation of the poorest readers among the potential clients of ABE must be borne in mind continuously. Until a student has internalized some degree of trust in both the educational agency's respectfulness and effectiveness, as well as in his or her own capacity to learn, the ABE program strategies should be designed as for a journey on eggshells. For that reason, it is recommended that the utmost care be taken in planning and carrying out the 3 key components of entry into an ABE program: the recruitment efforts, the intake process, and the initial instructional sessions.

### A. Recruitment

According to Irish, "A survey of adult basic education program directors conducted in 1973 found that almost 80% of the directors felt that improved recruitment strategies were of critical importance to improving adult basic education programs and half indicated that this was the most important area for improvement" (p. 39). Furthermore, not only do effective recruitment practices lead to a larger pool of potential long term students, but if carefully planned should aid in the retention of those students.

Recruitment strategies may be divided into two categories: 1. ways to make contact with potential students and 2. messages to be conveyed in any verbal and nonverbal communication about the ABE program and its intended clients.

1. Making Contact. Ways that have been used to seek out and attract potential students include:

- a. Door-to-door or telephone canvassing.

b. Print and media publicity, such as posters and flyers, as well as announcements, advertisements, interviews, and human interest stories in newspapers, magazines, and on radio and television.

c. Referrals from established institutions, such as schools, community agencies, and government agencies, with which links have been set up.

d. Referrals from business and industry.

a. and b. Although there is divergence about the usefulness of some of these ways, there is consensus that "among undereducated adults, personal sources are more effective than non-personal sources" (Bock, p. 125). Cross states: "Information disseminated via media . . . serves well educated people best. People from lower socioeconomic groups express a greater need for more personalized one-to-one conversations that can help them make the connection between individual goals and appropriate learning opportunities" (p. 46).

Mulvery (p. 2) notes: "Every successful program of recruitment in the United States has relied primarily upon personal invitation to attend the classes from a member of the student's own peer group." Stauffer found that "A total of 40% of the students first heard about volunteer literacy lessons through a friend or relative" (p. 80).

Irish reports the results of the POR-FIN (Program Organizing Related Family Instruction in the Neighborhood) study in which paraprofessional recruiters, selected and trained to "listen" with "major emphasis initially . . . on building rapport," made home visits to an experimental group of 80 potential students. A control group of 85 received information about the ABE program solely through flyers or by word of mouth. Thirty of the 80 in the home-visited experimental group enrolled while only 2 of the 85 in the control group enrolled. (This particular study, incidentally, points up the fact that recruitment isn't all: the subsequent dropout rate was significantly high, apparently related to the instructional quality of the class attended.)

In addition, among the most effective recruiters are those directly associated with the ABE program: successful students and, in some instances, teachers. Darling recommends that "Students who have successfully completed the program should be used in recruitment teams to go to areas of need for presentations concerning their own personal success stories" (1983, p. 42).

Reporting on Project REACH, Irish describes door-to-door canvassing and television spot announcements by ABE program participants who discussed their experiences in the ABE program

as well as other personal information (pp. 41 and 42). The combination of door-to-door canvassing and personalized TV spots accounted for the great majority of enrollees in the program, with radio messages and newspaper advertisements useful only as reinforcement of information in some cases.

C. Referrals from established institutions apparently vary in value as a source of recruitment. The picture that emerges indicates that such sources are effective when they are first thoughtfully solicited and provided with orientation to the ABE program and are then continually followed up. Simply relying on initial agreements to refer prospective students does not seem to work. Greenleigh Associates (1969), in their fine evaluation of 13 ABE programs throughout New Jersey, found a dismal picture. The major sources of recruitment throughout the state were a variety of community and governmental agencies that promised to recruit but did not, on the whole, fulfill their promises. Instead, "Adults attending classes were the best recruiters and . . . word of mouth was the best recruitment technique" (p. 12), although these, too, fell far short of the programs' goals. The Greenleigh evaluators recommend that a set of guidelines be developed to improve cooperative relations with the community (p. 21).

On the other hand, "a statewide study of recruitment in Iowa found that agency referral was the single most effective recruitment tool among those used in urban areas" (Irish, p. 47). (She suggests caution, however, about using government agencies--they may not have the trust of potential participants (pp. 47-48).) Waite states that ABE literacy programs must develop partnerships with other public, private, and non-profit entities within the community (p. 3).

In her report on the Adult Education Dropout Project (1981), Long describes an elaborate recruitment program for high school dropouts, ages 16-24, in which high school guidance counselors and attendance officials as well as various alternative programs and outside agencies were used. The findings indicate the need for continual personal contact with such recruitment sources: when a source was asked merely to send lists of names to be contacted, almost no lists were sent. Long's report outlines the special techniques used to set up on-going links--including inservice sessions for ABE teachers on the topics of referral and dropout.

August and Havrilesky also found networking with various agencies to be valuable, stating: "The most dependable and consistent supply of prospective students is likely to come from educational and social service agencies with whom you maintain relationships" (p. 22). They also list specific techniques for establishing and fostering such relationships.

Vorst and Lucey (1982), too, give a very detailed, practical listing of ways to develop and maintain links with resources on local through national levels.

d. Business and industry receive mixed reviews as a source of referrals of those whose reading ability is very limited. The New York State Adult Basic Education study found that "employment services and . . . personnel directors in business and industry referred employees with greatest potential for job upgrading and job placement" (p. 70), and did not, therefore, send illiterate workers.

In addition, very poor readers are either not prominent employees in a well-structured industrial organization or have managed to conceal their deficient reading and are loath to make it known. Darling (1981) found that the employed students in the ABE program hid their reading deficiency from their employers and depended on their co-workers to help them compensate. She felt it better not to look to business and industry in recruitment, since, in her study, employers and prospective employers were not aware of the reading deficiency.

On the other hand, Stauffer found that, more so than for any other ethnic group, "Employer and television were the high percent category for blacks" with respect to how they first heard about the literacy classes (p. 43). Irish, too, found employers and labor unions to be useful sources, while Edmund Clark states that adult educators could make their programs more attractive "by orchestrating their designs in concert with local employers to produce programs that lead to respectable employment" (p. 24). Jones and Petry favor linkages with both business and community resources (p. 7).

It appears that with regard to business and industry referrals, each situation should be assessed individually for its recruitment possibilities, with awareness of possible shortfalls and with careful establishment and maintenance of communication when referrals are sought.

2. Messages to Be Conveyed in Recruitment. Where opportunities exist to enroll in an ABE program, failure to do so is probably rooted in either practical concerns or in lack of hope for success--for many persons there is a combination of both. Recruitment communication should try to address both types of hindrance.

Practical considerations are underscored by Wallerstein as well as by Fitzgerald. Wallerstein states: "Probably the best way to recruit students in my experience is to provide support services. Day care and transportation are obvious needs; assistance with government agencies or counselling can be equally important. A paid outreach co-ordinator/social worker

will add immeasurably to a project's success" (p. 15). From a study of 100 person-to-person interviews in a Midwestern slum area, Fitzgerald concludes that "the hard-core illiterate's most pressing needs are primarily of an economic nature. Until those needs are met, these adults cannot be expected to register in ABE programs. ABE should cooperate with social agencies and organizations that are based in the community of the hard-to-reach" (February 1984, p. 27).

Because the specifics of practical needs differ from community to community, ABE program planning should include a survey to determine those needs for the prospective program clientele, provide the most feasible means to meet them, and make sure that those provisions are clearly and sensitively communicated as part of any recruitment process.

The lack of hope of success, the other prime source of resistance to enrollment, may stem from what Cross points out: "Those with low educational attainment have probably had many bleak experiences with education. If they learned one thing in school it may have been that they were not good at learning . . . and that their feelings of self-worth will not be enhanced by exposing themselves to further failure." Furthermore, "It is not simply a matter of making information about educational opportunity available to undereducated Americans, it is a matter of changing the image of education and learning--for individuals and for whole groups" (p. 34).

Knowles suggests that the barrier of negative recollections "can be reduced by interpreting adult learning activities as being different and enjoyable and perhaps by having the meetings in nonacademic locations" (1980, p. 46). Darling suggests that "all advertising and recruitment" should stress the difference between the adult program and "the regular school program where the adults once failed." Furthermore, she recommends that the confidentiality of students' inquiries and enrollment be emphasized in recruitment procedures (1981, p. 76).

Resnick and Robinson also point out the importance of privacy and anonymity for some adult illiterates. For such clients, the possibility of tutorial instruction might be offered (p. 263). They also stress the importance for prospective students of having visible models, such as successful students, as encouragement for their own efforts.

Another aspect of the recruitment message relates to the goal-orientation that is communicated. Darling found that "In general, the illiterate adult student enrolled in the reading program does not consider himself as having any problem in routine daily living with which he has not found a way to cope." It is therefore desirable that "recruitment appeal and

material selection . . . concentrate more on the appeal of employment, children and basic skills and less on . . . activities such as reading a bus or TV schedule" (1981, p. 36).

In general, employment goals (to gain or upgrade employment), hopes related to children, and desire for self-improvement are among the strongest verbalized motives in almost every study, although individuals often express other specific ones (e.g., reading the Bible). Certainly, the question of student expectation is one that merits serious planning in recruitment, even though subsequent intake procedures (as noted below) should also include individualized focus on each student's personal goals. Recruitment communications, written and oral, should present a realistic yet hopeful picture of the possibilities, taking into consideration some likely perceptions of prospective students. It may be, as Ulmer and Dorland note, that "illiterate adults perceive literacy education instruction programs in many geographic locations to be of no benefit--or that the education process is too long to be of immediate assistance" (p. 7). On the other hand, over-optimistic expectations that are quickly overturned after entry into the ABE program may prove to be devastating.

Eggert adds: "Many other seemingly innocuous decisions may also influence who is served and which needs are attended to. Consider the impact of the location and even decor of an office. Free space in a church basement will attract a different group of volunteers and students and will provide close support for a different set of non-reading needs than will a spare room in a high school, a corner of a community center, a donated store-front, or a space in a public library. The style of recruitment posters, who answers the phone and how, and who endorses and program, will each have an impact on who is served and how" (pp. 8-9).

Eggert indicates the importance he places on these factors and on the entire recruitment effort by recommending that as much expertise as possible be retained at the start of a program to deal with these and other key decisions rather than take chances with inexperienced planning (p. 13).

#### B. Intake

While each program should recruit by the most fruitful means available, and try to convey the most effective initial messages about the program, it may not be possible during the recruitment efforts fully to control what messages are actually conveyed or to prevent misunderstandings of those messages. The subsequent intake procedures, however, may be subject to greater monitoring and provide opportunities to clarify and

supplement the student's preliminary perceptions of the ABE program.

One of the basic tenets of effective remediation in a subject of prior failure is the need to address both an affective dimension and a dimension of instructional activities focused directly on the subject. Both dimensions are equally important: "love" is not enough, nor are the "lessons" alone enough. Nowhere is this duality more vividly apparent than in adult basic education programs. On the one hand, the students in such programs bring with them a huge emotional residue of countless past failures and disappointments, as well as a somehow-scraped-together supply of new hopes. On the other hand, the extremely limited amount of reading acquisition that characterizes the ABE student implies a highly individual profile of reading needs. During the intake procedures, the stage should be set for a remedial program that addresses both dimensions.

1. Intake Conference. Intake should include at least one individual meeting with the prospective student and a member of the staff who is well-prepared for such a conference. It should include a review of the student's educational history, and a discussion of the student's perceptions of the problem, its origins, and any insights the student has into ways that he or she learns best--all designed to involve the student in an objective appraisal of the problem and thus start the process of dealing with it. Kotinsky states: "Adult elementary education is mis-called [education] unless it attempts to build the attitudes and motivations that lead to continued learning, self-directed and self-impelling" (p. 100), and it is such self-direction that an objective appraisal may initiate.

Another productive use of an intake conference is to learn if the student has any questions, large or small, about the program. Such questions should probably preface a description of the program by the program representative--for clues about the student's concerns before embarking on a description whose goal is to alleviate as far as possible the student's anxieties about what lies ahead. Awareness of the student's immediate concerns should be helpful for how the program is presented. Moreover, a student might well reveal an anxiety about a concern that a few facts or an honest discussion could dissipate, leaving the student free to concentrate on the other points brought up during the conference. An accurate, positive description of the program can then follow.

a. Student expectations. In the Portage Township study of ABE program dropouts, it was found that 76% (or 140 out of 184) of .0 to 4.9 reading level students who left the program had entered because they expected it to help them pass the GED.

The study report includes a suggestion that perhaps if more realistic expectations had been discussed at intake, such students might have been less likely to become discouraged and drop out (Unmet Needs, p. 37).

Taylor et al. also discuss the importance of early confrontation of student expectations. In their in-depth interview study of 17 low-literate adults, they came to the tentative conclusion "that in any adult literacy class or program one might find students who vary greatly in the way they perceive literacy and its outcome" (p. 75). They also found "a few students who appeared to lack clarity about their goals . . . We would hypothesize that these individuals are more likely to be early program dropouts. Along with basic skills, a critical early aim in these students' programs should be goal clarification" (p. 76).

b. Student schedules. Intake sessions should also address the student's daily and weekly schedules as well as the transportation facilities between home/workplace and the program's location. Convenience of transportation is mentioned repeatedly as one of the factors in determining attendance for ABE students (Jahns, p. 210, among others).

Discussion of the program's schedule and of ways to achieve a minimum of sacrifice of other necessary or pleasurable time allotments should also be part of any intake conference. How other aspects of a student's life will continue while reading classes and practice in reading are incorporated into his or her weekly schedule should be explored. Gates states as his first principle of the formulation of a remedial program: "Remedial instruction should not be substituted for enjoyable activities" (p. 30). The intake conference should provide an opportunity to acknowledge the value of any competing activities. Students could be helped, too, to make adjustments that would minimize feelings of guilt about conflicts between reading class sessions and other attractions. Eventually, as Newman indicates, if the student perceives that the class sessions are worthwhile, other activities will lose their appeal (p. 10). At the very early stages, however, it would be important for the student to see the ABE program as a gain rather than as a sacrifice.

The question of how the student's weekly schedule fits into that of the ABE program schedule can most easily be answered if the ABE program schedule is flexible. Harris (1984, p. 15), Longfield (p. 5) and Gold (p. 19), are among the many who recommend such schedule flexibility. There is little agreement, however, on which time is best. Darling, for example, recommends fewer afternoons, more Saturday classes, and efforts to set up schedules to accommodate bus schedules

because given a choice 58% of the students chose evening classes, 29% chose morning and 10% chose afternoon classes in the Jefferson County project (1980-1981). Otto, on the other hand, notes that Greenleigh Associates (1964) recommend that programs should replace evening classes with day classes. Otto agrees, commenting that "Provision of day programmes could help to solve logistical problems for [jobless?] women in particular; but all participants would probably be better able to respond to instruction during the day rather than after the fatiguing activities of the day" (1972, p. 295).

The question of which hours are most convenient is thus one that must be determined by each ABE program for itself, based on a survey of its community and prospective student body.

c. Estimation of progress. Another student concern might be that of the length of time that his or her reading acquisition will require. That is one of the most delicate of the questions facing both the provider and the consumer of a literacy program. The rate of individual progress is a mystery that can be unveiled only as the instructional program proceeds--and even then, growth is characterized by learning plateaus during which little apparent change takes place. While it is wise to try to make the student aware that time passes quickly and that there will be many subsequent years in which to benefit from the ability to read, such encouragement may not easily countervail the natural reluctance that any adult might feel at making a long-term commitment to tackle a problem that has heretofore meant only demeaning failure. In any case, open, positive discussion is preferable to unrealistic expectations in either direction: looked-for miraculous progress or total despair of success.

2. Reading Diagnosis. Intake for an ABE program should also include a simple, yet skill-specific diagnosis of strengths and needs in reading. Havrilesky gave early diagnosis as one of the key factors in successful programs, relating it to the efficient use of time. She indicated that without such early, well-targeted diagnosis, several weeks of the instructional program are spent in floundering and false starts, as the teacher tries to determine individual needs within the time frame of the class sessions. (Personal communication.)

It may well be that in even less fortunate circumstances, teachers may simply proceed to conduct instruction without even trying to pinpoint specific student competences and instructional needs. Zimmerman states, "Few teachers seem honestly aware that it is insulting and frustrating to the learner to have to work on a level of performance which is either so assumptive or difficult (meaningless) as to

continually frustrate him or so replicative of previous experiences as not to 'challenge' or 'stretch' him a little. If teachers had such awareness they would do more pretesting or diagnosing before they implemented prescriptions for learning" (p. 344).

Kilty states that a diagnostic test is better than trial lessons or an informal reading inventory, while Newman stresses the need for "early and continuing diagnosis of adult basic education students" (p. 29). Long, Marzano, and Stauffer are also among those who emphasize a careful initial diagnosis.

The initial diagnosis might be carried out by the same person who conducts the intake conference, by the teacher, or by a third person. The important thing is that it be done by someone skilled in reading diagnosis. Greenleigh Associates observe that, in their comprehensive ABE program evaluation, "many [of the instructional staff] lacked the academic background which would have helped them to . . . diagnose the kinds of difficulties students were having" (1969, p. 15).

It is equally important that the diagnostician be knowledgeable about the frequent resistance of ABE students to testing (Cranney, 1983, p. 418). Karlsen found, in his study of the testing behavior of ABE adults, that basic education adults are "considerably more apprehensive about taking tests" than are grade school and high school students (pp. 99-100). Moreover, as Godbey points out, "Timed tests cause problems for adults who become less learning-efficient under time tests" (p. 8).

In addition, Karlsen found that "Most significantly, adults are reluctant to guess and will omit an item rather than do so" (p. 99). While this tendency may penalize an adult on silent reading tests where allowance is made in the statistical norming for guess (and should add a pinch or two of salt to the results of scores adults obtain on such test), it may also be helpful in arriving at an accurate diagnosis.

It should be emphasized, however, that a preliminary diagnosis is never intended to be the final word on a student's reading behavior--continuing diagnosis is a tenet of all wise instruction--but sensitively done, it sets a tone and provides information that helps get the educational program started in an energetic and businesslike way that should inspire confidence in both the student and the teacher.

### C. Initial Instructional Sessions

In keeping with the general guideline of "walking on eggshells" in the initial contacts with students on early levels of reading acquisition, it is of utmost importance that

students experience success in the most concrete ways in their first undertakings of reading-related tasks. Knowles (1980, p. 46) speaks of "early success experiences that will help them build positive self-concepts as learners," while Bock, outlining the stages through which adults move upon engaging in a new activity, describes Stage 4, when the activity is finally tried out--corresponding to an ABE student's attending a first class session--and notes that "This is the stage when many undereducated participants drop out . . . and it calls for assurance that the first class session will be a positive experience" (p. 127).

Thus, at the very beginning, carefully designed reading-related tasks should be assigned. The goals of the tasks should be derived from the preliminary diagnosis and should be directly related to a student's demonstrated reading skill deficiencies. In addition, in carrying out the tasks, every opportunity should be provided for successful completion by allowing ample time for practice and consultation. Moreover, the student should be able quickly to find out how well he or she has done. The principle of immediate feedback, considered by Mikulecky to be an important factor in successful ABE,<sup>2</sup> should be called into practice from the very start.

Darling (1981) tells of how, in recognition of the importance of the first session, the Jefferson County program arranged for former students to be on hand to greet new students and remain to serve as tutors. Long, too, is very definite about the importance of the first session, and goes into detail about how, upon the student's entry into the room at that first session, the teacher should be sure to indicate recognition by smiling, nodding, or making a brief comment. She suggests, too, that the student should be given a folder for materials, helped to fill out any forms, and be otherwise welcomed and thoughtfully oriented.

Much of the discussion of the remedial program that follows is relevant to the initial instructional sessions as well.

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<sup>2</sup>Personal communication. Two other factors named by Mikulecky are "time on task" and "skills integrated into meaningful tasks."

## II. THE REMEDIAL PROGRAM

Despite the most careful recruitment and intake procedures, an ABE program will fail its students if subsequent remedial procedures do not follow through on meeting those students' needs.

As was noted earlier with respect to intake procedures, remediation consists of 2 dimensions, the instructional and the affective, both equally important and, particularly for ABE students, often intertwined. We will first examine the findings for the instructional, namely, the curriculum and the techniques used in teaching ABE students to read, and then look at affective procedures.

### A. Instructional Factors

Different authors use the terms "approach" or "method" when referring either to a combination of curriculum/teaching techniques or to a (generally published) teaching/learning "system," which also combines a curriculum and specific teaching techniques. In the survey that follows, each of those 3 terms (approach, method, system) is assumed to mean some combination of teaching techniques and curriculum.

In general, the methods that have been identified in the ABE studies have tended to be either carefully structured and sequenced on the one hand, with a strong phonics component or, on the other hand, less structured, informal, and with incidental phonics. Into the structured group fall the Laubach, i.t.a., Steck Vaughn Adult Reading, and the Mott Basic Language Skills among a number of others. The informal programs include the LEA (Language Experience Approach), the whole language approach used by the Literacy Volunteers of New York, and "eclectic" approaches in which teachers call upon materials and techniques from a variety of published and non-published sources.

The question of whether there is one method of reading instruction that gives best results for adult basic readers is certainly the single most important practical question for ABE teachers and providers. Otto cautions, however, that "The best method is as elusive as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" (1972, p. 294) and Brown and Newman warn, "Exaggerated claims should be suspect, as should claim by publishers that a single approach can be used to solve the reading problems of all students" (1970, p. 30). In addition, those ABE research studies that have been reported frequently suffer from a lack of information about specific methods used in the study. Not only is there often no name or description of the method or methods used (perhaps because there was no method mandated), but even where one is named, there is rarely a description of

the efforts made to insure that it is being carried out according to design so that successful methods could be replicated.

Despite those limitations, it is possible to arrive at some generalizations about effective curriculum characteristics and instructional techniques, if not about any one total package or system. These generalizations are derived from research reports as well as from statements by those who have worked with adult illiterates.

1. Structured, Clearly Spelled-Out Methods. There is considerable weight of evidence in favor of methods that are structured and spelled out as clearly as possible, with reading texts as well as materials for follow-up practice by the students, and instructor's guides of suggestions to accompany the students' book (Heding et al., p. 33). Many ABE programs depend upon instructors who have had little background in the teaching of reading and who are thus not well equipped to undertake methods that rely on a high degree of teacher expertise. Research efforts have been made, therefore, such as that by Greenleigh Associates (1966, cited in Brown and Newman, 1970, p. 27) "To identify those learning systems that have a high degree of teachability calling for the least possible skill on the part of the teachers and the capacity to withstand poor teaching." They selected 4 structured systems for study and found that each of the 4 produced gains, with none of the systems significantly more effective than any of the others.

From another study, their 1969 evaluation of New Jersey ABE programs, Greenleigh Associates conclude, "The absence of a structured ABE curriculum indicating what should be taught at each level and which materials, subject elements, techniques, and methods of measuring goal achievements were to be employed is a program deficiency" (p. 10).

Verner and Booth focus on the importance for students of instructional guidance: "Those with less educational experience will be more dependent upon the direction provided by an instructional agent in deciding what to learn and how to approach a learning task. They will encounter difficulty in handling new and unfamiliar material, in making relationships between what they know and what they are learning, and in learning to manage the learning process" (p. 52). For such students, it is important that the tools of instruction be clearly laid out and discernible to all--students and teachers alike.

2. Inclusion of Both Decoding and Comprehension. From the three-year Jefferson County study, Darling concludes: "The most beneficial adult literacy curriculum should revolve around a sound, proven basic series, which includes decoding and

comprehension skills presented in a sequential manner . . . supplemented with other materials as specific needs arise and interests are identified" (1981, pp. 25-26).

Darling's stipulation that both decoding and comprehension skills should be included reflects what is probably the nearest to a consensus on the question that the field of children's beginning reading has wrestled with for centuries, namely, whether a phonics/decoding or a whole-word/meaning approach is best. While it is still possible to find a totally meaning-centered adult literacy program in which "tutors are strongly discouraged from using phonics as the basic method of instruction" (Koen & Musumeci, p. 4), an acceptance of the need for decoding as well as comprehension instruction is more usually voiced. Sticht, in his discussion of the importance for reading acquisition of training in oracy (i.e., listening comprehension and speaking), assumes that both decoding and comprehension should be emphasized. He states that oracy instruction should parallel decoding instruction during the first two reading grade levels and that the combination should impact on reading comprehension performance from grade 3 and above (1974, p. 91).

N. Taylor et al. talk of "the necessity of integrating the decoding process with the accompanying comprehension of the printed word . . . an incorporation of both skills to become a better reader" (p. 73). When the low-literate students in their interview study were asked what they felt was effective in the literacy programs they were attending, however, many statements referred to such instructional techniques as "sounding out the words." Other poor readers "seemed to define reading as decoding proficiency" (p. 72).

Boraks and Richardson also observed this perception of reading among ABE students, and for that reason, although they favor a language experience approach, they conclude: "Although teachers view reading as a process which encompasses sophisticated comprehension skills and fulfills the reader, many ABRs view reading very concretely and personally. Hall, Richardson and Ramig (1976) found that adult students often define reading as decoding, or getting the letters . . . promoting use of the ABR's current skills and expectations is the initial but not the final step in the learning-to-read program" (p. 18).

The preponderance of findings and recommendations in favor of structure, sequence, and direct decoding instruction at the very early levels of reading (rather than informal or language/context instruction) are consonant with the results of Koen and Musumeci's study of the whole language approach of the Literacy Volunteers of New York. They found that while there was growth in reading (as measured by reading test scores) for

all students in the program after the first 50 hours of instruction and for higher level students beyond 50 hours (at the 100 hour point as well), the reading of students who read at 2.0 or less actually retrogressed after 50 hours and continued to retrogress as the students continued in the program.

Also, Malicky and Norman report on the reading strategies of 16 (dropping down to 9 and then to 3) adult students with reading levels from 0 to 6th grade. The students were enrolled in a program of language experience instruction, during which grammatical rather than graphic cues were focused on. Results indicate that those who improved used graphic cues to a greater extent after the period of instruction while those who showed no gain used grammatical or semantic cues to a greater extent after the period of instruction. There is no indication of whether the differences were significant, but they were consistent for 6 sets of comparisons (p. 733).

3. Sequence of Instruction. Related to and often included with recommendations for structure are those for sequence. Bowren and Zintz state: "Reading develops in an orderly, sequential pattern regardless of the learner's age. Teachers who fail to recognize this fact often cause confusion to the learner" (p. 77). Greenleigh Associates found in their ABE program evaluation that black students in the programs complained of "no sequence in learning . . . too much fragmentation" (1969, p. 53).

Kilty, too, states, "Materials that provide structure and sequence without precluding the teacher's opportunity to deal with specific interests or problems are needed." He emphasized, however, that such materials "should provide small units of work that may be completed during an instruction period as well as an opportunity . . . to proceed at his or her own rate" (p. 40).

4. Sufficient Practice. Another finding about which there is widespread consensus is that ABE students need time and often much practice to assimilate new learning before going on to other new learning. The need for practice is one of the most agreed-upon teaching factors in ABE.

Thus, Sain states: "Many reading activities should require meaningful practice, varied repetitions, and numerous opportunities for stabilizing basic skills of word identification and comprehension" (p. 440). Allington, in discussing reading acquisition in general, states, "Much evidence has accumulated that suggests students need wide experience with reading tasks that are performed at near error-free level" (p. 27). Sticht points out: "It must be realized that the development of automaticity in decoding, say in adult

literacy training, requires considerable drill and practice" (1974, p. 124).

In the evaluation study of Project LEARN, Pasch found that time in practice, rather than simply time alone, was what was effective for the poor readers in the program, as the post-test scores "correlated most highly with 'number of lessons' completed and was not particularly related to the 'number of hours tutored or days in the program'" (p. 17).

Mocker states, "It is one thing to teach the skill of reading, and quite another to get a person to read . . . . Failure of this process usually results in poor readers. However, adults who are illiterate do not have built-in reinforcements. Special attention must be given to adults who want to 'practice' newly acquired skills" (p. 39). Park points out that adults need time to develop hierarchical knowledge structures and "need to be given extensive practice with different types of reading material" as perhaps a way of doing so (Language, p. 13).

Chall, in discussing the stages of reading, refers to adult literacy programs' point of failure, noting that after literacy classes complete their Stage 1 programs, in which they learn to decode, there are not enough readable materials available--material that is familiar in its use of language and content--for the new literates to gain the fluency of Stage 2 (grade equivalent levels 2 and 3) in which the reader "gains courage and skill in using context and thus gains fluency and speed." Moreover, "The greater the amount of practice and the greater the immersion, the greater the chance of developing the fluency with print that is necessary for the difficulty to come--the acquisition of new ideas in Stage 3" (1983, p. 20).

5. Supplementary Materials. In order to provide the adequate practice in reading, it is necessary to have available an assortment of materials supplementary to the materials of the central system, since students vary in their reading interests as well as in the amount of practice they require. Furthermore, supplementary materials should include materials for independent reading, to give relaxed reading practice and to expose students to the pleasures of reading.

Brown and Newman also highlight the place of supplementary materials, noting that in their study of 207 ABE students reading at 3.0 level or below, "it was found necessary and desirable to develop considerable supplementary material both from an interest standpoint and from the need of extending the materials horizontally for the slower members in the group" (1970, p. 35).

The importance of supplementary materials was also noted by Stauffer. In his study of the Laubach literacy program he found that "Tutors who used supplementary teaching materials with their students had 18.4% fewer dropouts. This difference was significant" (p. 72).

Many authors stress the importance of having students read on topics of interest to them. Hutchinson found that an experimental group of 20 students did significantly better after 60 hours of structured instruction with individualized teacher-made selections based on their stated interests than did a control group of students who worked in a large group arrangement with commercially prepared instructional workbooks and kits. The experimental group also was allotted a time for reading supplementary materials on their independent reading level, to be discussed at the next class session.

Hutchinson notes, however, that the experimentals attended significantly more hours and raises the question of "whether the improved silent reading comprehension scores were the result of the particular strategies employed, or whether those specialized strategies produced increased attendance which made greater achievement possible" (p. 206). One might add, did the individualized instruction, the structure, or the supplementary practice, or some combination of them also play a part in the increased attendance and the increased achievement?

(I had a problem deciding whether to discuss this study here or in the section on absenteeism. Hutchinson reports that the successful experimentals attended over 30% more often than did the controls. That is, the experimentals achieved a mean of 28.75 hours against the controls' 20.70 hours. What Hutchinson does not highlight, although she supplies the information, is that the potential attendance was 60 hours (two 2-hour sessions each week for 15 weeks). I wonder what the achievement would have been if the students had attended for the full 60 hours, and at the same time, note ruefully Hutchinson's seeming acceptance of such high rates of absenteeism.)

In any case, it is suggested that ABE budgets include funds for supplementary materials, over and above any teacher-made ones. Moreover, time should be allocated to determine students' interests and to supply books, articles, magazines, and the like to capitalize on those interests. Time should also be allotted to encourage independent reading of supplementary materials, as for example, browsing in a class or program library, or listening to the teacher read or discuss supplementary books. Supplementary books should be available for students to borrow to take home. Several copies of the same book should be available in situations where there are groups of students, because there are relatively few

appropriate ones on the market (Chall, 1983, p. 122) as well as because having students read the same book independently may lead to discussion about the book and to resultant added pleasure in reading.

6. Mode of Instruction. August and Havrilesky use the term "mode of instruction" in discussing grouping and student-instructor ratio. On this factor, Ulmer and Dorland prophesy that in the 1980s, initial instruction "for adult students who are non-readers or who read below the third-grade level . . . will be conducted on a one-to-one basis by paraprofessionals or volunteer teachers, supervised by professional teachers. Students will continue to be tutored until they can read at a third-grade level or higher, at which time they will transfer to a learning center or group instruction program" (p. 21).

Consonant with this view were the findings of Koen and Musumeci several years later that "Individual tutoring produced better reading gains for lower functioning adults than group tutoring. Higher ability students on the other hand seemed to profit equally well from both tutoring models" (p. 37). They caution some reservations about this finding in their Literacy Volunteers of New York evaluation, however, "since sampling constraints were operating" (pp. 35, 37).

Darkenwald also recommends 1-to-1 tutoring for adult beginning readers, stating: "A major reason [that traditional ABE programs have been ineffective] is that conventional programs . . . lack the resources to provide the individualized, one-to-one instruction that is needed to remediate severe reading deficits" (1983, p. 1). His Project F.I.S.T. is designed as a volunteer 1-to-1 tutorial program adjunctive to on-going ABE programs, with students being referred out of F.I.S.T.'s tutorial when they reach 4th grade level on a reading test.

Gorman, however, found that there were "no significant differences in the rates of progress related to the different types of tuition received by students, e.g., one-to-one or group tuition" (p. 197). He did find significant differences in favor of students who did not change tutors and in favor of those who moved from 1-to-1 to group tuition (p. 197). Although Gorman does not suggest reasons for the latter finding, and despite the fact that his study was of ABE programs in England, the large size of his sample gives weight to the indication that group instruction has value--in certain cases, more value than 1-to-1 tutoring.

In her report on the Jefferson County Project, Darling notes that 4 different grouping patterns were in operation. The only one that was related to significant gain in reading comprehension after 30 hours of instruction was a pattern of

multiple teachers with paraprofessional assistants and volunteers, working with a group of students.

Darling herself is very clear on the value of groups, especially for the support they offer. She recommends providing for students to meet in groups, even when instruction itself is given in the form of individualized tutoring (1981, p. 75).

At this point, the research evidence on this most basic program feature is still unclear, and more evidence will be required before any definitive recommendation can be made for the early level readers of this survey. The prudent program planner would do best to aim for flexibility, with the possibility for either 1-to-1 or group instruction available, and the size of any group kept small enough so that close contact can be maintained with each student when he or she is engaged in a reading related task. The crucial factors of immediate feedback and continuous diagnosis should be kept in mind over and above all other considerations.

In addition, when groups are set up, it may be important to be aware of the need for a certain degree of homogeneity in the overall goals of the students in the groups. Greenleigh Associates tell of programs where Spanish-speaking and foreign born students were sometimes put "into the same classes as native born students with consequent division of teacher's focus" (1969, p. 53).

## B. Affective Factors

An ABE program may bear on students' affective needs in a variety of ways, some more directly than others--but all can play a part.

1. Teacher Characteristics. First on the list of factors that relate to the affective dimension should probably be the personal qualities of teachers as reflected in their behavior in the ABE program. Many efforts to determine the characteristics of effective teachers of different types of students have been made--with a few concrete findings. For ABE instructors, however, there seem to be certain characteristics that research evidence, experienced ABE program heads, or articulate students have identified.

a. Respect and confidence. The debate on whether teaching is a science or an art is a familiar one (e.g., Jahns, p. 205). I have come to believe, however, that while teaching has some elements of both science and art, it is most essentially a relationship. In ABE especially, while there is value in scientifically-based ordering of the learning environment and in creativity in devising ways to meet needs

that arise, it is the display of respect and confidence characteristic of sound relationships that is truly crucial.

Thus, Greenleigh Associates, in the follow-up study of participants in their earlier field test of students reading below 5th grade level conclude, "a good many learning systems are inadequate and perhaps there are none that is fully suitable for the semiliterate and the illiterate poor. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that there are available systems that can be used with success by teachers without the usual credentials, but with qualities of heart and mind which make them responsive to their students as human beings that can be developed" (1968, p. 2).

Houle urges, "The new student should be provided with the continuing assurance that he can acquire or regain good learning skills" (p. 232). An example of how such assurance can be expressed was revealed in the study by Taylor et al., in which students often talked of their "lack of confidence and their instructor's belief in their ability. In [one student's] words, 'they keep telling me I can do it, and I begin to believe I can'" (p. 76).

Darkenwald, after describing life changes of students in the F.I.S.T. program, states, "it is likely that the close, supportive relationship between individual tutors and their students played a major part in encouraging and supporting constructive action" (p. 9).

Knowles points out a specific way to show respect: "Probably the behavior that most explicitly demonstrates that a teacher really cares about students and respects their contributions is the act of really listening to what the student says" (1980, p. 47). Longfield, too, notes that adults need to maintain a sense of dignity (p. 5), while Newman states, "Adult learners require more reassurance than do children when learning to read" (p. 95).

b. Sensitivity and compassion. While the need for sensitivity and compassion may seem self-evident, the statements of some authors underscore their importance. Thus, Cranney, in discussing computer assisted instruction for adults, brings his discussion up short, stating, "Remedial adult students need the compassionate attention and sympathetic understanding of skilled teachers. The persistent record in the literature . . . of adult teachers' need for flexible counseling abilities tempers one's enthusiasm for ACI" (1983, p. 419).

For Kotinsky, sensitivity toward the ABE student must have depth and breadth. She states, "Kindliness there must certainly be, but kindliness is not sufficient. What is

required is keen sensitivity to the particular feel of a way of life to an individual or to a group . . . and their resistances as the educational process impinges upon their on-going experience at home, at work, and in their wider socio-economic relationships" (p. 86).

In addition, from the results of their Buffalo study, Brown and Newman suggest "The need to be aware of the peculiar learning problems of the city-core illiterate; this demands a special sensitivity in teachers which too often is not properly emphasized, valued or taught" (1968, p. 35).

Taylor et al. found that the overriding aspect that ABE participants in their study apparently perceived to have distinguished their current ABE program from earlier school experiences was "a caring aspect on the part of the programs' teachers. This important humanistic aspect was noticeably absent in students' recollections of their prior school experiences" (p. 74).

Paul Taylor stated that, above all, an ABE teacher must be sensitive. Adult students, who become aware of the teacher's feelings very quickly, will drop out if the teacher is insensitive. Teachers who do not succeed in relating well to ABE students should be counseled out (Personal communication.) Identifying and counseling out a person for whom ABE teaching is unsuitable is a task that itself requires a program head or surrogate of sensitivity and tact. ABE providers need to bear in mind the direct line from program head to ABE student when programs are put in operation.

C. Teacher morale. While I have tried to avoid including research on non-adults, one result in a study of elementary and secondary students should be noted. That is, Anderson's finding of a significant relationship between teacher morale, defined as satisfaction with the school, and both attendance and achievement in both elementary and secondary schools. Other factors, such as mean salary, mean hours of preparation, or checking of record books were not related (p. 389). Apparently, teachers will work for low pay, work extra hours, and do supervised paperwork without its affecting their functioning as teachers. If they are not satisfied with the school, however, students will suffer.

Because of its prominence in Anderson's careful review and because it ranges over so wide a spectrum of teaching situations, the factor of teacher satisfaction with the school should be considered and planned for in ABE programs as well.

As is well-known, because of the many years of low priority of ABE, many ABE programs have suffered from poor organization and shoe-string financing. As a result,

conditions that would not be tolerated in even the most limited elementary or secondary school in the same community can be seen in a local ABE program. The teachers in such programs often bear the brunt. Thus, Lopez and Smith describe some of the conditions they observed in their survey of adult basic education in Illinois: "Many instructors work with little or no job security or clear career line in the field of adult education. Many programs expect part-time instructors to decide what will be taught and how, recruit students, and follow-up, as well as to counsel and keep records. With a relatively low stipend and an absence of fringe benefits, the part-time instructor often subsidizes much of the program" (p. 26).

The implications of poor conditions for teacher morale and hence for student achievement argue loudly for higher standards.

d. Teachers who explain well. So simply termed yet so elusive a quality as "good teaching" may have been identified by ABE students. Two different studies came up with a similar picture. Thus, in the interview study by Taylor et al., mentioned earlier, in which students were asked about affective factors in ABE programs, it is reported that "Many students mentioned the willingness of their literacy instructors to 'help you out' if in difficulty or if something is not clear. Specifics included a willingness to explain things and go over the material with the student as much as necessary. Demonstrating on the blackboard was often mentioned as a technique students particularly valued" (p. 72).

In the Portage Township study of ABE dropouts, it is reported that of 30 students who had dropped and then returned to the Adult Learning Center, 70% (or 21 of the 30 students) "said that the most helpful quality of their teacher was the way they 'gave clear and simple explanations.' Only 30% of . . . students who had not returned . . . perceived this teacher quality as the most helpful. Furthermore, no other single program variable . . . received nearly as high a percentage of affirmative response" (Unmet Needs, p. 32).

As a result of this finding, the author of the report concludes that "For those who would attract and retain the low-level academic student, perfecting the teaching skill of giving clear and simple explanations can be highly recommended. It may be satisfying a low academic student's most profound educational need" (Unmet Needs, p. 39).

This ability gains added importance in light of the findings of Jones and Petry in their observations of ABE teachers that "The most commonly observed teacher action was the verbal explanation of a concept" (p. 76). Moreover, "It

appears that the quality of instruction, when audio-visual aids are employed, is not as high as when the teacher explains content verbally" (p. 66).

e. Enthusiasm about reading. Havrilesky, highly experienced in the field of ABE, said that the best ABE teachers are those who are enthusiastic about reading, rather than those who are best at general counseling and guidance. She further pointed out that someone who has been a lifelong reader has wide general knowledge and is equipped to engage in literary forays that may help meet or inspire student interests (Personal communication). Research evidence for this view is available. From his review of 70 studies, Marzano reports that enthusiasm about reading was one of the teacher characteristics identified as having been shown to influence student achievement. Such interest is "highly contagious."

On this point, Oakley described a "reading club" established by Feinman in which ABE students met outside of class, each time to discuss a high interest/low reading level book that they had all read independently. She reported that the students delighted in the experience of discussing the books. Feinman's love of reading and desire to transmit that pleasure was the key factor (Personal communication).

2. Awareness of Progress and Achievement. Another factor is believed to contribute to effective ABE instruction is that of student awareness of progress. Mikulecky, as noted earlier, indicated the importance of immediate feedback, as does Long, in her study of ABE dropouts, as well as Hayes (p. 144), among others. An ABE program can take steps to try to evoke a feeling in students that growth and forward movement is indeed taking place as a result of all the effort and frequent sacrifice made by the student. It is easy to understand how, without such a feeling, effort may lessen and sacrifices (in time, diversions denied, cost of transportation and meals, and the like) may no longer seem worthwhile.

Wallace points out, "Adult students cannot fail today and succeed tomorrow; for if they fail today, they will not be back tomorrow. The teacher must constantly feed back verbal credit for every success, no matter how small . . . the teacher must make every learning experience a success . . . it is better to stop short while the lesson is still a success than to go a little further and bring on failure" (pp. 43-44).

Verner and Booth state, "Research indicates that awareness of progress is essential to continued learning" and recommend on-going evaluation, to "provide continuous integrated measurement of progress. Such evaluation must be personal rather than competitive so as to enhance the internal motivation of the participant" (pp. 56-57).

According to Gates, "Part of the strategy of remedial work is to shift the emphasis from failure to success . . . as an incentive to a better attitude and greater effort . . . [It] is even more vital in the case of a pupil whose difficulty has been of long standing. It is important to select and manage the first lesson so that something positive will be accomplished . . . To develop a taste of success after prolonged failure is one of the devices which insure continued success" (p. 34).

Gates goes on to recommend that "Improvement should be measured and the record shown." Because the student needs "both the teacher's assurance that he is getting on and objective evidence of improvement . . . The daily achievements may be recorded in graphic or other form . . . The statement 'Nothing succeeds like success' should, perhaps, be changed to 'Nothing succeeds like observed success'" (p. 35).

Although Gates is discussing remedial work with youngsters, there is validity for ABE students in his suggestions. Devices as simple as a student's notebook, carefully maintained, file cards, personal charts of progress and the like might be encouraging for some adults. A student's own folder with exercises completed, listings of pages read, words or other instructional units mastered, are other ways to achieve step-by-step record-keeping.

Long also advocates praising students, noticing their achievement of goals, and providing adequate feedback. Working with the student on developing realistic short and long term goals and then regularly evaluating the student's progress toward those goals are other steps she suggests (1981).

Yet, Irish observes, "While educators recognize the need for positive reinforcement and for creating success experiences for adult learners, the least educated often receive less of this positive support within the educational environment" (p. 40).

### III. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

Much of the success (or failure) of an ABE program is due to the administrative structures within which it operates. This section includes several administrative aspects that bear on the success or failure of ABE programs. These include staff development, retention, attendance, counseling and time.

#### A. Staff Development

The term "staff development" is used here as an umbrella term for a variety of training, educational, support, and communication procedures designed to promote and utilize the talents and commitment of members of a staff--an ABE staff in particular.

The necessity for staff development in ABE programs is so well-known that it was almost listed above under Assumptions. Because of its powerful relationship to effective programs, however, and because the time, energy, and expense it demands might cause it to be short-changed, the subject needs some elaboration in a report like this. As Smith and Lopez discovered, "Most of the programs evaluated had some kind of organized in-service training effort, but systems and plans for this need much greater attention and allocation of resources" (p. 26).

First of all, new teachers (and other new staff members) need to be helped to a good start. The report of the Detroit University Basic Education Demonstration Project states, "Extensive pre-programme training should be conducted for the instructional staff regardless of academic background and teaching experience." Otto, citing the recommendation, adds, "A competent elementary school teacher does not automatically turn out to be a competent ABE teacher" (1972, p. 290).

As it is impossible either to proffer or to absorb in advance all that is entailed in carrying out the requisite responsibilities of an ABE staff member, staff development should continue beyond any initial training. Jones and Petry state, "Inservice education . . . is an admirable characteristic of any program" and "should be based on the improvement of teacher competency" (p. 26). Stauffer found that, in his study, "Students of tutors with more hours of tutor training gained more, certainly a case for thorough training" (p. 79).

Even when the instructors are not novices to teaching, such training is essential in ABE. Thus, in the less effective New Jersey ABE programs, Greenleigh Associates note that "There was evident sincerity among the vast majority of the staff in dealing with the learning problems of the students, but a large

number of teachers were not properly trained or effectively guided to provide a systematic program of instruction to meet the needs of their students" (1969, p. 15). Moreover, in order for the inservice growth of teachers to take place under optimum conditions, it is important that teachers have the benefit of expert guidance. From his study of 70 effective reading programs, Marzano concludes that expert consultant help should be provided for all teachers, particularly those with minimal teaching experience (1977).

## **B. Attendance**

The high rate of absenteeism in ABE is taken to be a fact of life, although an embarrassing and destructive one. The embarrassment shows in the New Jersey ABE program evaluation findings that "the figures for registration generally appear to be inflated . . ." In most communities registration figures were unrelated to actual attendance. A class could have an enrollment of 20 but only 2 or 3 in attendance" (Greenleigh Associates, 1969, p. 12). In the same study, the destructiveness of absenteeism is noted as well: "Most of the ABE teachers thought students were making progress but that their efforts to teach were being thwarted by the high rate of absenteeism" (p. 102). August and Havrilesky also point out, "Although programs with as little as 50 percent retention often consider themselves effective, teachers are unable to carry through a sustained and logically sequenced instructional plan when half the class is absent" (p. 14).

The effects on achievement of poor attendance are reported in the New York State ABE study: "There is a direct relationship between regular systematic attendance and reading achievement. The irregularity of attendance of adults because of the many causes which would keep adults from attending class is detrimental to reading achievement goals" (p. 70).

Absenteeism plagues ABE programs everywhere. Mangum reports it as a problem in the ABE programs in Utah--more so than for high school equivalency or ESL programs. The JCARP in Kentucky built its entire, reportedly successful, program around efforts to improve achievement by cutting down absenteeism through comprehensive counseling techniques.

Other approaches include that noted by Gold, with students in penal institutions in Massachusetts and California, where such incentives as time credits against sentences were offered for attendance and achievement. She reports, "Initial results show that incentive pay tends to stabilize students in the program, reducing both absenteeism and attrition and increasing interest" (1984, p. 19). Whether the logistics of incarceration make it easier for students to attend if their motivation is high than it is for free students, with their

many problems of daily living, is a valid question. In any case, using extrinsic motivation, of obvious material value, is another way to deal with the problem of ABE attendance. Other means include having the teacher follow-up on absentees with phone calls or letters (Long, 1981) or having a "buddy system" as some JCARP had, with buddies reporting to the group about a student's absence (Darling, 1981, p. 16).

Verner and Booth report a different approach to encourage attendance: "Research indicates that participation in planning by community members tends to result in significantly higher attendance in the programs involved" (p. 54). Over and above any specific features that the community planning introduced into the program, the sense of ownership that such participation implies may go a long way toward binding the students to the program.

### C. Retention in the Program

Although absence from classes is a serious problem in an ABE program, at least as distressing is the total withdrawal from the program. Many studies have referred to the dropout problem and a number have focused on it (e.g., Anderson and Darkenwald; Heathington, Boser, and Salter; Unmet Needs/Portage Township study). Researchers tend to conclude that withdrawal is less often a failure of the program itself than a result of outside forces, although factors within the program may play a part.

Anderson and Darkenwald's study (of 9,173 adult education respondents to a questionnaire) showed that ABE and high school completion program students "are four times more likely to drop out than are other adult education participants." Moreover, "The dropout rate for adults who are young, black, ill-educated and poor is (not surprisingly) very high. Considered individually, each of these factors has only slight impact on persistence. Considered jointly, the effects of these factors on persistence is striking." Thus, alone, "Black racial status has little effect on participation in adult education" since when other factors are controlled, "Black adults are slightly more likely than nonblacks to participate in adult education" (p. 14).

Patterson and Pulling, who worked with young, black, ABE students, see factors within the student that may lead to separation. Thus, they note a frequently encountered pattern of high student dropout at certain intervals: right after the first week, "because students panic over the threatening prospect of failure," and at 3 and 9 months because their motivation has been reduced once they are reassured they are not stupid, or because they don't feel they are making any progress" (p. 34). Darling reports a big dropout time in

January, so that individual student conferences are planned for that time, as a preventive measure, to deal with such feelings (1981, p. 16).

Gold, too, refers to plateaus of progress, when "illiterates are at high risk for dropping out of the literacy program" (1984, p. 30). She recommends self-help support groups of ABE students to help deal with the frustration at such times and perhaps prevent the student from withdrawing.

Others, too, have referred to the usefulness of group feeling in ABE programs; some have gone even further, stressing the value of deliberately providing a pleasurable social environment for ABE students. Greenleigh Associates report that in a number of New Jersey ABE programs with very low rates of attraction and retention of black students, when black attendees were asked about the deficiencies they perceived in the programs, one of the answers given was: "No provision for socializing with fellow students to make programs more appealing" (pp. 53-54).

Newman, discussing ABE students in general states, "Adult basic education students meeting together in classes often find much enjoyment in the social times made available before, during, or after class" (p. 96). Darling recommends that reading class should be a "pleasant social experience" and that, in addition, the "dynamics of the group by structured to encourage each student to motivate others to attend regularly" (1981, p. 75). Jones and Petry also advocate the planning of social activities (p. 23).

An ingredient of such socializing, as well as of any individual tutoring, might well be one that Newman refers to in her discussion of how to set a relaxed tone in intake conferences (p. 15), namely, having some kind of food or drink available. Such light refreshment is often used in private remedial work. Not only is the session thus associated with pleasure, but there are also the benefits of relieving any distracting hunger pangs (especially helpful with busy adult schedules). Any budget for an ABE program might therefore include funds for light refreshment, to be available at a time selected by the instructors and the students.

Another approach to reaching students who stopped attending is that of active follow-up. Among the many recommending it are Heathington, Boser, and Salter, who also note that "The lack of adequate staff to conduct the necessary followup of dropouts is a problem for literacy programs" (p. 22).

Anderson and Darkenwald found for their whole sample, that the most powerful predictor of persistence in adult education

programs was "satisfaction with the learning activity in terms of the 'helpfulness' in meeting one's objectives" (p. 17). Finding fault with the program, however, was just a small part of what accounted for dropout: "Only 11 percent of participants reported being dissatisfied." They concluded, therefore, "We know little about the economic, psychological, and social forces that affect participation and persistence in adult education" (p. 17).

A more subtle and perhaps more revealing questioning was used by Russell: only 30% of his subject indicated factors outside of the classroom when asked why they thought others dropped out. (When asked why they themselves dropped out, the overwhelming majority of dropouts give reasons that relate to out of the class problems.)

The Portage Township study led to a conclusion that is consonant with Russell's findings: "Instead of fixating on the turnover rate (of low educational level students) one should try to establish the 'optimum learning conditions' for adult learning in one's center. The measure of one's success should be such conditions and not the capricious variables which control the lives of many of our most under educated clientele" (Unmet Needs, p. 37).

#### D. Counseling

The value of counseling for ABE students is vigorously recommended by an array of researchers. Kavale and Lindsey state: "Previous school failure may make the illiterate adult feel unacceptable as a student. Ongoing counseling must be provided to assist them with the psychological problems accompanying the quest for literacy" (p. 371).

Bock notes that counselors can be especially helpful to ABE participants in relation to their feelings of lack of confidence in their ability to learn. She also cites Grabowski on research on the topic: "One of the few research studies on counseling of adults revealed that there is more progress along educational, occupational, and social dimensions among counseled participants than among non-counseled participants" (p. 140).

On the acceptance of counseling services by ABE students, Cross states: "We already know that educationally disadvantaged groups are more interested in counseling and advisory services than are better educated groups. Blacks are more interested in guidance and counseling than whites and low income groups are more interested in counseling regarding personal and on-the-job problems than high income groups . . . in general, research suggests that counseling services

providing personal contacts should be overrepresented in low-income areas" (p. 40).

Verner and Booth underscore the need for expertise in such counseling, stating that "Counseling procedures handled by skilled adult counselors are the best way to uncover personal individual needs" (p. 54).

Jones and Perry allude to the value of providing counseling as a method of increasing enrollment in an ABE program (p. 25), a method whose goals were expanded to include retention and achievement as well by the exemplary Jefferson County Adult Reading Program (JCARP). The JCARP incorporated counseling into each aspect of its functioning after finding, in its early years, that attendance and achievement were more highly related than method and achievement. Counseling procedures intended to maintain attendance were devised and instituted, and, according to their reports, proved successful in increasing attendance and in keeping the dropout rate relatively low. Thus, their attrition rate was 22%, while the attrition rates of ten comparable programs ranged from 80% to 52%. On the question of reading achievement, for 173 matched subjects, the JCARP students showed a mean reading test gain of 1.58, while the controls showed a mean gain of .88, significant at the .001 level (Darling, 1982, pp. 6-7). The higher retention rate and reading test result scores are attributed to the counseling concept embodied in the program's recruitment, staff training, instruction, and evaluation components (p. 4).

#### E. Time

Reference was made above to "quickie" ABE programs of limited duration. Such programs have been characteristic of ABE for many years, and have been protested for many years. In 1959, William S. Gray stated, "One of the most impressive lessons taught by past efforts to extend literacy is that short-term campaigns, which provide no systematic follow-up activities or are unrelated to other educational efforts of a community, are usually ineffective in establishing functional literacy" (cited in Brown and Newman, 1970, p. 42).

Almost 10 years later, Greenleigh Associates reported on a 17 week study in which follow-up evaluation of students after 6 and 12 months, successively, found that the majority retrogressed. They concluded that "unless positive action is taken to continue education or at least some group activity, a short exposure to education is not of long-term educational value" (1968, p. 92), and "Long-term programs with all the concomitant follow-up services, funded for at least two years, are necessary" (1968, p. 105).

Yet, 15 years later, in an analysis of 1077 adult education projects funded throughout the United States during fiscal years 1979 through 1983, Parker, of the U.S. Office of Education, Division of Adult Education, found that not only was funding per typical project "minimal" but that time investment seemed to be minimal, too. "A large majority of projects are single year efforts" (p. 4).

Perhaps because ABE students are older than the children who are the traditional "beginning readers" and are therefore more mature and developed, the assumption is often made that adult illiterates should be able to achieve in months, even weeks, of isolated hour-or-two sessions what school children accomplish in years of full-time study. Paradoxically, on the other hand, also because they are older, ABE students themselves, as well as others, may perceive them to be less able, ultimately, to grasp what the younger can (in analogy, perhaps, to young children's quick acquisition of spoken language). These misperceptions may be set right with the well-established information that learning ability does not decrease with age but that more time is needed.

Thus, Brunner, addressing the question of age and learning ability, cites Lorge: "Lorge sums up the findings of research in this area effectively when he says, 'Whenever learning ability is measured in terms of power ability--i.e., learning without stringent time limits, the evidence is clear that the learning ability does not change significantly from age 20 to 60 years'" (p. 13).

In Monge's study comparing two groups--20 women in their 20s and 20 women in their 60s--the task was to learn lists of words at fast or slow paces. He found that "the best-performing group was the older group at a slower pace . . . The older group at the faster pace was the worst, and the two younger groups did not differ substantially" (pp. 55-56).

More recently, Weber, summarizing generalizations on adult learning asserts that they "include the finding that the time needed to perform certain tasks increases with age but that the level of performance does not change significantly through adulthood" (p. 156). Furthermore, Longfield, in her listing of the characteristics of the adult learner, whether ABE or ESL, spells out why adults require more time than children: "Since adults do not see, hear and react as quickly as children, they require more time for reaction and more practice for performance" (p. 5).

Others, like Sticht, link the process of learning to read to the need for longer programs. He states, "while skill in reading decoding is necessary for accuracy and efficiency in comprehension of what is read, it is not sufficient. Thus,

decoding may be excellent, but if vocabulary, knowledge and thinking processes are limited, reading comprehension . . . will suffer" (1974, p. 116). He therefore considers it ill-advised to try to "teach reading in adult basic education classes in 'concentrated' programs of some 100 to 200 hours . . . Since knowledge structures are achieved only over long periods of time . . . it is naive to believe that . . . a few hours of phonics training with some 'general' reading and 'general education' [can] produce a literate adult with the language and cognitive capabilities of the typical 8th- or 12th-grade student" (1974, pp. 116-117).

Similarly, Kazemak asserts that literacy is more than "the reductive kinds of instruction that train an adult to manipulate certain types of surface language conventions in a very restricted range of situations," and such greater breadth "takes time, patience, and imagination. It certainly takes more than 30 hours, 30 days, or 30 weeks" (p. 335).

It is not surprising, therefore, that, as Stauffer reports, for the National Affiliation for Literacy Advance (NALA) study, there were significant gains with more hours of instruction as well as with longer sessions (i.e., of over one hour). He also notes a trend toward greater gains for time in the program, irrespective of hours of instruction (p. 69). It may well be that just having commitment to the program had a positive effect on how students performed with respect to reading.

Anderson reports that with respect to any kind of instruction, time spent in instruction is related to academic outcome (p. 399). ABE teachers are aware of this, as Kent Smith affirms, "Perhaps the greatest challenges (frustrations?) experienced by A.B.E. instructors have to do with time and strategy: How can adults make significant reading progress when they are able to attend class only once or twice a week? How can class time be structured to provide adequate instructional time for each student?" (p. 767). The absenteeism noted earlier adds to the problems.

On the question of individual session frequency and duration, it is a truism of educational psychology that massed practice is less effective than distributed practices (Stephens, p. 410). The relative degrees of "mass" and of "distribution" have never been really spelled out for reading instruction and certainly not for adult basic education. The F.I.S.T. reports an imprecise "one or two times a week for one or two hours" (Darkenwald, 1983) while the JCARP program provides three-hour blocks of time once a week (Darling, 1981).

Nonetheless, the factors of frequency and duration of individual sessions in ABE programs have never, to my

knowledge, been subjected to experimental scrutiny, although the Adult Basic Education New York State study data indicate that the optimum number of hours related to reading achievement "is from 9 to 12 hours per week" (p. 70).

It may well be that practice difficulties of making room in a life schedule already filled with responsibilities forecloses the possibility of requiring attendance of more than once or twice a week. It is also true that opportunities for reinforcement of simple reading learnings abound, with innumerable incidental exposures to reading matter between formal class sessions. (Obvious examples are on streets and in shop windows, on food and other containers, TV writings, and the like). It is also possible and some programs provide for it, that giving homework to reinforce classroom learnings may provide greater distribution of practice. This factor, too, of giving homework (with spelled out procedures and careful preparation for such homework) has never, to my knowledge, been scrutinized scientifically for ABE students.

For ABE students on early reading levels, the factor of time imposes another burden. For them, Greenleigh Associates' findings probably reflect the views of more than the "few" referred to: "A few emphasized that it was frustrating to attend school with the realization that, with the rate of progress they were making, it would take years and years to reach a point where their education would make any difference in the money they earned and in the way they lived" (1969, p. 54).

It is difficult to think of a palatable truth with which to ease the discomfort of so seemingly grim a realization. Perhaps a sensible way would be to focus with the student on a "one day at a time" mind set rather than to hold up the vision of a final goal attainment paradise. Poor achievers, by definition, have not had much experience with the prolonged, gradual accrual entailed in all substantive achievement, and may benefit from the assurance that while much time is needed for all literacy acquisition, there are daily gains that can be observed. Moreover, to reiterate points made earlier, having each instructional session be geared toward opportunities for observable achievement, even in small steps, may give credence to a hopeful attitude. Seeking out ways to connect the instructional sessions with everyday reading and writing situations might also indicate to the student that there are on-going benefits to be gained.

Providing such an encouraging instructional environment calls for rich and complex skills on the part of the ABE teacher--which brings us to the final role that the factor of time plays in effective reading programs, namely, time for the ABE teacher to develop and continue to nurture those skills.

The complexity of ABE instruction for low literate students means that even the most talented "naturals" need long-term ongoing communication with knowledgeable mentors and colleagues about their students and instructional programs. Time should be allocated for staff discussions, in-service conferences, individual consultation, observation of other teachers, and other wholesome staff development practices.

In addition, such allocations should be made for the duration of the ABE program, since the level of professional competence required for successful ABE instruction takes time to evolve and needs continuous maintenance. As Greenleigh Associates note about the unsuccessful programs in their study, "an unrealistically small amount of time was set aside . . . for staff training . . . [for] a program of such complexity. It was distressing to observe teachers struggling with classes because they were not prepared to teach the skills needed by the class when, in fact, these same teachers, who were endowed with intelligence, sensitivity, and classroom presence, could become fine instructors if they were properly trained" (1969, p. 79).

## CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion of the characteristics of effective adult literacy programs was designed to be a guide for ABE program planning and development. Although every effort was made to base the findings on research and reliable sources, however, it is not assumed that they are definitive. Rather, it is hoped that they will be used for initiating discussion among ABE providers and practitioners--to stimulate new perspectives and to give support for helpful practices already in place.

In addition, and especially in cases where there are divergencies of findings or opinion, it is hoped that objective searches for new evidence will be undertaken. Because there is currently a climate of focused interest in adult basic literacy within government at all levels as well as in the private sector, support for ABE appears to be more available now than it had been in the past. Such support should be used to generate careful research as well as to meet the costs of operating on-going programs.

Finally, it is hoped that the joining of knowledgeable, dedicated workers in the field of ABE with substantial government and private support will lead to increased accomplishment by the students for whom ABE is intended.

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